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Rural Young People

and

Their Future Plans

Opinions and Attitudes of Selected Rural Young People Concerning Farming and Rural Life in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, 1951-52

by

Frank Uhlir and Helen Abell

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RURAL YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FUTURE PLANS

Frank Uhlir 1/ and Helen Abell 2/

INTRODUCTION

Prior to conducting a study dealing with factors that influence farmers in their decisions on what to produce, a preliminary enquiry was made in a mixed farming area of Alberta in the fall of 1951.3/ The information obtained indicated that the sons and daughters of farmers, as well as their wives, influenced the farm operators' decisions. As a result, it seemed advisable to undertake another study to obtain more information about the thinking and plans of rural young people. A summary of the results of this study is presented in this report.

The study was carried on by means of a mail questionnaire, circulated during the fall of 1951 and the winter of 1952 to staff members and students of schools of agriculture and other organizations in the Provinces of Alberta, Ontario and Quebec.

This present report is a summary of a detailed study of the responses of 667 out of approximately 800 questionnaires as received from selected rural young people. The word "selected" is used because these students were deliberately chosen for the reason that they represented an interest in, or a connection with agriculture. Of the total number of students whose

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1/ Technical Officer, Farm Population and Rural Life Section, Economics Division, Canada Department of Agriculture, who was responsible for analysing and reporting the findings of this study.

2/ Economist, Farm Population and Rural Life Section, Economics Division, Canada Department of Agriculture, who initiated and supervised this study.

3/ As a part of this preliminary enquiry Dr. Abell spent some time on a typical farm near Ponoka, Alberta. This experience and the opportunity of discussing problems with local farmers provided information useful in the development of the project on which this report is based.

questionnaire responses are utilized in this report, 417 were in Alberta (most of these were students of three agricultural schools, some were members of two calf clubs and of one Women's Institute, and the remaining respondents were pupils of three public schools); 211 were in Ontario (students of two agricultural schools and of one agricultural high school) and 39 were in Quebec (students of one agricultural school). With regard to sex, 527 (79 per cent) of the respondents were male and 140 (21 per cent) were female.

During the year 1952, detailed tabulation of questionnaire results from each of seven individual schools (and the one agricultural high school) were prepared and presented to these schools for their information and use. Copies of these individual reports were also made available to certain Provincial and National Government officials in the Departments of Agriculture.

This section presents the analysis upon which the main findings are based (see pages eight to 12). Detailed statistical data concerning each of the schools and organizations (by province and sex of respondents) as well as totals for all provinces and all respondents, are available on request from the Farm Population and Rural Life Section, Economics Division, Canada Department of Agriculture, Ottawa.

THE RESPONDENTS

Age.- The average age of respondents to the questionnaire was 18 years for the men and 17 years for the women. The range of age was ten to 29 years. Most of the respondents fell into the 15 to 19 year age group. The percentage of respondents in this age group, by provinces, are as follows:

Alberta:	73.3 per cent of the men,	60.3 per cent of the women;
Ontario:	66.1 per cent of the men,	68.4 per cent of the women;
Quebec:	84.6 per cent of the men,	
All Provinces:	71.5 per cent of the men,	61.4 per cent of the women;

Educational Level.- The number of school grades completed ranged from seven to 13 for all respondents. The average number of school grades completed was 9.9 for men and 9.3 for women. Only four respondents (men in Alberta and in Ontario) had

attended College or had any specialized training beyond the 13th grade prior to the time of the study. A few respondents (11 men and six women) did not state what grade of school they had completed.

Occupation When Not at School.- A direct or an indirect connection with farming was shown by 94.3 per cent of the male and 66.8 per cent of the female respondents, insofar as when not at school they were occupied on farms as farmers, farm workers, farmers' wives or daughters.

Place of Residence.- When the questionnaire was distributed, all students in schools of agriculture were in residence at the school. Home addresses indicated that 94.2 per cent of the men and 92.7 per cent of the women lived on farms. The size of farm from which these respondents came was classified for purposes of analysis as "small" (320 acres or less in Alberta, 100 acres or less in Ontario and Quebec), "medium" (321 - 800 acres in Alberta, 101-299 acres in Ontario and Quebec), or "large" (801 acres or more in Alberta and 300 acres or more in Ontario and Quebec).

Less than one-third of the men and one half of the women came from "small"farms, approximately one half of the men and one-third of the women came from "medium" farms, and less than one-quarter of the men and less than one-fifth of the women came from "large" farms.

WHAT YOUNG FARM PEOPLE PLAN TO DO

Desired Occupation.- The intention to adopt farming as their future occupation was reported by 90.7 per cent of the male and by 24.8 per cent of the female respondents. A choice involving a combination of farming and non-farming occupations was expressed by 3.9 per cent of the young men and by 22.5 per cent of the young women.

It may be pointed out here that out of approximately every four men who came from farms and stated their intention to farm in the future, there was a ratio of only one woman from a farm who stated her intention to spend her future on a farm.

Size of Future Ideal Farms.-1/ Satisfaction with the present size of farm was expressed by 60 per cent of the men and 57 per cent of the women. It was clearly shown that the respondents tended to prefer farms of medium size. The trend shows that those coming from small farms consider a medium farm as "ideal". It also shows that there is a lesser tendency for those on medium farms to consider a "large" farm as ideal. A counter-trend from actual large home farms to future ideal medium farms was mentioned. Thus the tendency was toward medium sized farms as ideal future farms. These "medium" sized farms, as previously mentioned, ranged in size from 321 to 800 acres in Alberta and 101 to 299 acres in Ontario and Quebec.

Crops and Livestock on the Respondent's Ideal Farm.- Nearly all respondents who answered the questionnaire said that they would raise crops and livestock on their ideal farm. Various grain, forage and cash crops, beef cattle, dairy cattle, and hogs were mentioned in their farm plans. Choice of combinations of enterprises as sources of farm income differed between individuals: for instance grain and forage crops were mentioned most frequently by 61.5 per cent of the men and by 42.1 per cent of the women in Alberta, while 44.3 per cent of the men in Ontario, 38.5 per cent of the men in Quebec and 36.8 per cent of the women in Ontario mentioned grain, forage and cash crops as the best combination of crops on their ideal farms.

With regard to livestock, 91.6 per cent of the young men in Alberta mentioned beef cattle as their most important livestock enterprise, while 78.5 per cent of the young women in the same province preferred dairy cattle. The hog enterprise was mentioned by 78.6 per cent of the men in Ontario, while 89.5 per cent of the young women in Ontario preferred dairy cattle. In Quebec 97.4 per cent of the men considered dairy cattle to be the most important livestock for their ideal farms.

Source of Power on Ideal Farms.- Only three of all the respondents preferred horses as the sole source of power. Less than one-third of all the young men and approximately one half of all the young women mentioned both tractors and horses as sources of power. The majority of the respondents (two-thirds of the male and one half of the female) mentioned tractors as the sole source of power.

1/ An ideal farm was defined on the questionnaire as "the one I'd like to have or the one most suitable to my part of the country".

Labour Requirements on Ideal Farms.- All men and women expressed the general opinion that approximately two full-time farmers are needed on a farm. These would tend to be the operator himself and a member of his family. In addition, approximately two farm workers (hired on a temporary basis) would be required.

In Alberta and Ontario the ratio of hired men to full-time farmers was one to one; the Quebec young men stated that for every farmer approximately 1.5 hired men would be required.

The length of time each year for which hired workers would be required varied among respondents from the different provinces. In Quebec, hired workers would be needed for an average of 5.1 months per year, in Alberta for an average of 4.6 months per year and in Ontario for an average of 4.4 months per year.

Most of the participants stated that they expected both the farm operators and hired labourers to work between ten and 15 hours daily in all seasons except in winter, when the number of daily working hours anticipated was nine or less.

The majority of young people in Alberta and Ontario stated that they expected the farm operator and hired man to put in an equal number of working hours each day for all seasons of the year. The Quebec respondents felt that the farm operator should work more hours per day than his hired worker except during the winter season when an equal number of hours per day would be spent in working.

The Housewife's Responsibilities on the Ideal Farm.-

According to both the men and women the housewife's main duty outside the home should be the care of poultry. Gardening combined with different farm chores was the next most frequently-named responsibility for the farmer's wife. The male respondents tended to relieve farm wives from heavy outdoor work, but female respondents frequently mentioned milking and field work as chores that should be the responsibility of the farm wife.

This difference in opinion between rural young men and women may be partially explained by the fact that a higher proportion of the male respondents than of the female respondents did come from farm homes and may be expected to have had a more

real appreciation of the role of the woman on the farm.

Equipment in the Ideal Farm House.- The men placed emphasis on plumbing, house construction and a heating system, whereas the women emphasized electricity, house furnishings, electrical appliances and furnishings such as a piano, library, radio, and television which tend to promote cultural activities. All respondents expressed a strong desire for electricity, plumbing and house furnishings.

Use of Leisure Time on the Ideal Farm.- Men expressed the wish for more relaxation (including reading and radio listening) in their leisure time; women expressed the wish for more social life, entertainment, and self-improvement. Rural young people generally preferred commercialized entertainment (movies and dancing) to self-improvement (religion and education) as the way in which the farmer's leisure time should be spent.

Social Contact with Neighbours and Organizations.- Men emphasized informal gatherings, recreation and mutual help groups, whereas women emphasized formal organizations, commercial entertainment and self-improvement activities as their sources of social contact with neighbours.

Potential Sources of Information for Obtaining Help in Farming.- The district agriculturalist 1/ was named by men as the main source of information concerning farming, while women mentioned consultation with other persons including farmers, neighbours and friends. Reading was equally emphasized by the male and female respondents as the second most important source of information on farming problems. Men tended to emphasize the district agriculturalist, schools, governmental offices, farmers' organizations and experimental farms as their sources of information. Women tended to emphasize reading, consulting other people, and listening to the radio.

These data indicate that the male respondents are inclined to seek formal sources of information and the female respondents to seek informal sources of information.

1/ In Alberta the term "district agriculturalist" is used. In Ontario the position is described as "agricultural representative" and in Quebec as "agronome".

The Respondent's General Attitude to Life.- In this study the respondent's general attitude to life is highly positive. Choice of future occupation was based predominantly on a liking for the work, whether that work was or was not farming. Other values expressed were personal satisfactions ("I like living in the country", "I like working with plants and animals"), independence, freedom and economic security.

A very small proportion (approximately six per cent) of the respondents expressed a highly materialistic attitude to life. These respondents tended to be relatively young (ages 14 - 17), they averaged eight grades of schooling and wished for ideal farms that would be larger than their parents' farms. These respondents (31 of whom were men and eight were women) based their choice of future occupation solely on its advantages as a way of making money.

The majority of respondents (94 per cent) expressed their general attitude to life by basing future occupational choice on values which were not purely materialistic. Men tended to emphasize independence, job satisfaction, economic security and acceptance of their opportunity to farm. Women tended to emphasize sentiment (a "liking" for farming or other work), altruism, a seeking for new experiences and in some cases comfort.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

1. Increasing Educational Level of Potential Farmers.

The educational level of the rural young people in this study, and especially of those who expressed an intention to farm, is proportionally high, reaching almost ten grades of school as an average. This indicates that educational differences between urban and these rural young people are not so wide as was once the case. This fact would seem to point with favour toward an increase in social stability and national homogeneity.

In this study a high proportion of rural young people (with or without some secondary school education) expressed their intention of remaining in the country and of farming for a living. Most of them did not indicate a preference for cities or for non-farming occupations. These attitudes were especially noticeable among male respondents in all three Provinces, and particularly in Quebec where all of the respondents mentioned farming or a combination of farming and non-farming as the future occupational choice. The average education of the female respondents in Alberta and Ontario was slightly lower than that of the men. A high proportion of young women expressed their preference for non-farming occupations in cities.

2. Disproportion Between Young Men and Young Women Preferring Farming as a Career.

The fact that more than 90 per cent of the young men stated their intention to farm, but that only 24 per cent of the women chose farming as a future way of life, appears to be a serious problem. The great disproportion between rural young men and women making farming their occupational choice affects the very root of country life because it concerns individual, family and social life in rural areas, as well as the policy of settlement of new areas and the stability and prosperity of new farming enterprises. An explanation of this disproportion among men and women may be found when it is realized that respondents from the agricultural schools may obtain training in agriculture or in home economics. This training aids the men in developing farming techniques. The home economics training may be utilized by the girls whether they set up homes in the country or elsewhere.

3. A General Tendency to Prefer Mixed Farming.

Those of the respondents who expressed a desire to farm, indicated their preference for a mixed farming enterprise. There is a slight tendency for some real specialization in farming. Specialization in grain was mentioned by a few respondents in Alberta, in Ontario specialization in tobacco or fruit was mentioned, but the overall tendency as found in the study was for mixed farming. It may be pointed out here that most of the respondents came from mixed farming areas.

4. Lack of Interest in Sheep Raising.

A minimum of interest in keeping sheep was found in the study. Young people did not state their reasons for this lack of interest. Possible explanations may include lack of experience with sheep, uncertainty about the economic value of sheep and the lack of any tradition connected with sheep raising.

5. Farm Modernization as a Value.

Practically all of the respondents from the three provinces mentioned the tractor as the sole or chief source of power on an ideal farm. Electrification of the farm is one of the greatest demands of both men and women. A running water system was also emphasized as desirable and necessary for an ideal farm. The frequent mention of these aspects of modernization indicates that many of these respondents, especially those on smaller or medium-sized farms, may have a very real need for some form of assistance (credit facilities, loans, subsidies or other assistance) which would enable them to realize their ambition to modernize the ideal farm. Credit facilities are available in Canada for the improvement of farm homes under the Farm Improvement Loan Act. It is possible that by taking advantage of such assistance some of these young rural people may be able to realize their ambitions.

6. The Demand for Seasonal Rather than Permanent Hired Farm Workers.

Men in Quebec indicated a need for more hired labour (1.5 labourers for every farmer) than did respondents in Alberta and Ontario (one labourer for one farmer). Men and women in all provinces expressed a need for seasonal rather than permanent

hired workers. This finding presents an economic and a social problem, for these seasonal labourers have no chance of employment as full-time farm workers. This problem might be solved by providing employment during non-farming seasons in trade centres which are surrounded by rural areas.

7. The Farmers' Wife and Her Contribution.

In all provinces the respondents emphasized the fact that a farmer's wife should have farm responsibilities other than housework. The farm duty named by most men and women was care of poultry. A few of the male respondents stated that the farm wife should have no farm duties apart from housework; this opinion was expressed by approximately three per cent in Alberta, nine per cent in Quebec, and 13 per cent in Ontario. All of the women felt that a farm wife should have duties other than housework and it was interesting to note that it tended to be the female rather than the male respondents who felt that the farm wife should help with the more arduous duties such as milking and field work.

8. Opportunity for Guidance of Leisure Time Activity Among Rural Young People.

Special attention may well be given to the ways in which respondents proposed to spend their leisure time. Leisure time is in many ways much more important for man's physical and psychological development than the hours he spends in earning his daily bread.

A man usually freely expresses in leisure hours his likes, dislikes, ambitions, desires and inclinations. He is governed during his working hours by duties, regulations, plans and programs which are fixed for him or by him. During his working hours he fulfils duties which he must perform; during his leisure time he chooses according to his own will and desire. Leisure time is, therefore, of great influence in his moral, intellectual, and physical development.

Rural young people stated how they intended to spend their leisure time at home, in town, and on Sundays. They mentioned activities which could be categorized as relaxation, social contacts, business and light chores, commercial entertainment,

and self-improvement. These responses provide a good starting point for analysis because they indicate clearly "where to find" young rural men and women after their daily working hours are through.

But it is not sufficient to know merely "where" they would spend their leisure time. It is much more important to know in what ways their leisure is being spent. As an example-- it is useful to know that they intend to read, but it is much more important to know what kind of literature they read or prefer to read. It is very important to know that they go to town to visit friends, but it would be much more important to know who their friends are. We cannot give an answer to these fundamental questions in this study because the young respondents were not asked to attempt to answer to such a highly subjective and difficult type of question.

Attention is called to the use of leisure time as a problem of greatest interest to all persons and institutions who have direct or indirect contact with rural young people: those who deal with youth either in the line of professional duty through the schools, churches and extension services, or in the line of less formal contacts through various types of clubs, associations, organizations, and the media of mass communication (radio, press, government publications and films).

Education, intellectual and moral development does not end after a person has left school. It continues throughout the whole of human life.

This study revealed clearly that most of the young rural respondents expected and wished to relax in their leisure time; reading was named more often than any other desired form of relaxation. Would it be possible to increase the supply of stimulating and thought-provoking reading material? Here is a problem which might well present a challenge to increase the readability and attractiveness of official publications - a challenge to authors, publishers, booksellers, editors, librarians and others.

Radio listening also ranked high as a desired form of relaxation. Would it be possible to initiate or to increase regular

evening programs suited to the needs and interest of these rural people?

The majority of respondents expressed their intention of spending evenings in town attending movies. The National Film Board has already made a contribution in providing short educational films. The type of film shown commercially in small rural theatres may give entertainment but the majority of these films provide little guidance for the development of a mature, adult personality. Here the film producers and distributors have a problem of great significance and there is no doubt that the role they play in national life is of importance and therefore carries a corresponding responsibility.

The young rural people co-operating in this study expressed a wish to attend dances. Would it not be possible to organize more youth centres for these people and to give them not only entertainment but a wholesome atmosphere in which to meet and mix with other young people?

Some of the respondents expressed the intention of spending leisure time improving themselves by attending lectures and church services. Is it possible to create for them so warm and attractive an atmosphere in the schools, churches and other institutions that they would maintain steady contact with their adult advisers even after their schooling is finished, and consider these adults as friends?

CONCLUSION

Some of the questions that have been raised in this report cannot be answered here. The provision of answers to these questions offers a challenge to enlarge the existing co-operation between Departments of Education, Agriculture and Labour, Universities, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and other agencies and organizations concerned with young rural Canada. These problems are presented here as a potential basis for further developing a program of activities designed to help Canadian rural youth to achieve for themselves a richer, fuller life.

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